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WINTER SURVEY INDICATES INCREASE IN CONTINENTAL WATERFOWL POPULATION

The annual winter waterfowl survey recently completed by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife indicates a total increase of 17 percent over the number of birds observed in a similar continental survey a year ago, the Department of the Interior announced today.

Largest increase was noted in southern portions of the Mississippi Flyway, particularly in southwestern Louisiana, where favorable marsh conditions attracted large numbers of ducks.

There was also a considerable increase in number of waterfowl seen in the Central Flyway, especially South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, and Texas, the Bureau said. Wintering mallard populations in the Columbia River Basin in Washington and Oregon continue to increase, although fewer total waterfowl were observed in the Pacific Flyway than a year ago.

In the Atlantic Flyway, there was a small improvement in total waterfowl numbers seen.

The Bureau emphasized increases or decreases in numbers of birds observed during the winter survey did not necessarily indicate a corresponding change in bird populations. Visibility conditions, observers, and habitat conditions vary from year to year, affecting the reliability of the observations. Breeding ground surveys in the spring have proven to be the most reliable means of determining the population status of breeding ducks.

Daniel H. Janzen, Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, said that the chief value of the winter waterfowl survey is to determine the distribution of waterfowl in relation to the condition of wintering habitat. The number of birds observed in specific areas is a good barometer of this, he said.

"A good example," said Janzen, "is the marshes of southwestern Louisiana, where conditions continue to improve. A summer drought, followed by the timely reflooding of the marshes by fall rains and the extension of rice farming into new areas, made Louisiana especially attractive to waterfowl."

The value of habitat improvement in Louisiana was demonstrated this year by an increase of approximately 3 million birds over those observed in the same area in January 1963. These were principally dabbling ducks such as shovelers, gadwalls, mallards, baldpate, and teal.

The winter survey also has value in determining the population status for a relatively few species of waterfowl, such as swans, geese, redheads, canvasback, and black ducks. However, to determine the annual status for the bulk of the waterfowl species, reliance is placed upon spring and summer surveys over the principal waterfowl nesting grounds.

Redhead and canvasback ducks have been fully protected for several years because of a population low for these species. A special winter survey made in mid-December showed a decided improvement in the redhead population which is now about 14 percent above the long-term average. Canvasback populations remain about the same as last year, and 6 percent below the 14-year average.

The percentage of change in waterfowl observed by flyways, as compared to 1963, are: Atlantic Flyway, plus 1.2 percent; Mississippi Flyway, plus 45.5 percent; Central Flyway, plus 24.4 percent; and Pacific Flyway, minus 5.2 percent.

The winter waterfowl survey is conducted and coordinated by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife with the majority of the field work being done by State game and fish departments. The United States Coast Guard and the Armed Forces cooperate by supplying aircraft for the survey. Many airplanes, boats, automobiles, and helicopters are used.

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